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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 040205043-4043-01]

RIN 0648-XC134

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic;
2012 Commercial Accountability Measure and Closure for South
Atlantic Vermilion Snapper

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National
Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS implements accountability measures (AMs) for the commercial sector for vermillion snapper in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the South Atlantic. The Science Research Director (SRD) has estimated that commercial landings for vermillion snapper are projected to have reached the commercial annual catch limit (ACL) on September 28, 2012. Therefore, NMFS closes the commercial sector for vermillion snapper in the South Atlantic EEZ on September 28, 2012, and it will remain closed throughout the remainder of the fishing year. This closure is necessary to protect the vermillion snapper resource.

DATES: This rule is effective 12:01 a.m., local time, September

28, 2012, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2013.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Catherine Hayslip, telephone: 727-824-5305, e-mail: Catherine.Hayslip@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The snapper-grouper fishery of the South Atlantic includes vermilion snapper and is managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP). The FMP was prepared by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and is implemented under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) by regulations at 50 CFR part 622.

The commercial ACL (commercial quota) for vermilion snapper in the South Atlantic is 302,523 lb (137,222 kg), gutted weight, for the current fishing period, July 1 through December 31, 2012, as specified in 50 CFR 622.42(e)(4)(ii).

In accordance with regulations at 50 CFR 622.49(b)(6)(i), NMFS is required to close the commercial sector for vermilion snapper when the commercial ACL (commercial quota) for the applicable portion of the fishing year has been reached, or is projected to be reached, by filing a notification to that effect with the Office of the Federal Register. NMFS has determined that the commercial ACL (commercial quota) for South Atlantic vermilion snapper will have been reached by September 28, 2012.

Accordingly, the commercial sector for South Atlantic vermilion snapper is closed effective 12:01 a.m., local time, September 28, 2012, until 12:01 a.m., local time, January 1, 2013.

The operator of a vessel with a valid commercial vessel permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper having vermilion snapper onboard must have landed and bartered, traded, or sold such vermilion snapper prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, September 28, 2012. During the closure, the bag limit specified in 50 CFR 622.39(d)(1)(v), applies to all harvest or possession of vermilion snapper in or from the South Atlantic EEZ, including the bag limit that may be retained by the captain or crew of a vessel operating as a charter vessel or headboat. The bag limit for such captain and crew is zero. During the closure, the possession limits specified in 50 CFR 622.39(d)(2) apply to all harvest or possession of vermilion snapper in or from the South Atlantic EEZ. During the closure, the sale or purchase of vermilion snapper taken from the EEZ is prohibited. The prohibition on sale or purchase does not apply to the sale or purchase of vermilion snapper that were harvested, landed ashore, and sold prior to 12:01 a.m., local time, September 28, 2012, and were held in cold storage by a dealer or processor. For a person on board a vessel for which a Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for the South Atlantic snapper-

grouper fishery has been issued, the sale and purchase provisions of the commercial closure for vermilion snapper would apply regardless of whether the fish are harvested in state or Federal waters, as specified in 50 CFR 622.43(a)(5)(ii).

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, (AA), finds that the need to immediately implement this action to close the commercial sector for vermilion snapper constitutes good cause to waive the requirements to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth in 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), as such procedures would be unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Such procedures would be unnecessary because the rule establishing the closure has been subject to notice and comment, and all that remains is to notify the public of the closure. Allowing prior notice and opportunity for public comment is contrary to the public interest. This action needs to be immediately implemented to protect vermilion snapper because the capacity of the fishing fleet allows for rapid harvest of the quota. Prior notice and opportunity for public comment would require time and would potentially result in a harvest well in excess of the established commercial ACL

(commercial quota).

For the aforementioned reasons, the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effectiveness of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3).

This action is taken under 50 CFR 622.43(a) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

Dated: September 24, 2012

Lindsay Fullenkamp,
Acting Deputy Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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